

DSE

THE LOW END of the Dick Smith Electronics (DSE) range of computers is the VZ-300 which epitomises the affordable computer — it's priced at less than \$100. There is specific software developed for the VZ-300, but the range isn't large.

This is an excellent beginner's computer; the provision of Microsoft Basic allows the user to write programs with a minimum of learning. Also, its predecessor, the VZ-200, still has thousands of enthusiastic users; (and a number of very active User Groups, which are an excellent source of information and public domain software on both computers).

In case you haven't already discovered it, the DSE catalogue is a worthwhile investment (\$1). Not only does it cover its wide range of computers and add-ons, but many of the products listed are designed specifically for younger age groups.

Product Details

Product: VZ-300

Memory: 18 kilobytes RAM
expandable to 34 Kbyte

Keyboard: 45 keys with auto repeat key.

Other: Data cassette; TV and Video output; Microsoft Basic builtin; options include joysticks, floppy disk drive, memory expansion kits and printer interface.

Price: \$99 taxed

IBM

Perched on a tract of elevated bushland southwest of Perth and whipped by bracing ocean winds, North Parmelia Primary School seems light years away from the heavy industrial smokestacks of nearby Kwinana and not at all like the setting for an exercise in primary school computing...

This exercise is bringing together the children, the teachers, the parents, the P&C, the Principal and a number of IBM PC JXs, in a relationship that is both educational and fun.

It began in October last year when IBM in Perth launched a computers-in-schools promotion. In the course of making a series of presentations to schools and P&C groups, the Educational Marketing Manager for IBM dealer Mycorp, Paul Gurry, met Andy Sieracki, Secretary of the North Parmelia P&C.

The outcome of the meeting was the



Figure 6. DSE's VZ-300 offers an almost painless introduction to computers.

sale of 10 JXs to the school. But as Gurry explained, the school bought more than just '10 boxes.'

Sieracki believes strongly that children should not wait until high school to be exposed to computers.

'Young children have no fear of computers,' said this father of four.

'The time to introduce them to computers is in primary school, when they can absorb and learn more readily.'

Principal David Nockolds pointed out features of the JX that fit into the school environment: the durability of the machine and the mini-diskette.

'The 3½ inch mini-diskettes are virtually child-proof,' said Nockolds.

'They also hold 720,000 bytes of information, a great feature when an entire classroom full of children may need to enter their stories on one diskette.'

The Statistics

Nockolds conducted a survey of Year 7 students and found that a surprising 50 per cent had computers at home — a high proportion, he thought, for a largely blue collar area which also has a large number of unemployed.

'Although many families said they use

their computers mainly for games, I also detected a trend in many others toward experimentation with other uses,' he said.

Since North Parmelia purchased the 10 JXs, about 15 families have also bought the computers for home use.

'The JX is the ideal family solution computer because it lends itself to educational use, and home business applications such as accounting and word processing,' said Paul Gurry.

Before he made the decision to invest in the computers, Nockolds' main worry was that the teachers might not use them.

'I think one of the main reasons for the failure of computers in the schools is the lack of interest and knowledge on the part of some teachers,' he said.

Making The A Grade

To make the North Parmelia computer scheme work, an intensive computer education plan was launched. It involved teachers, parents, the P&C and computer training conducted by Michele Stewart, another teacher. Sieracki also played an active role, conducting some of the training seminars.

A user software library was established for parents with computers, for a nominal